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United States Department of Agriculture  
Extension Service  
Division of Cooperative Extension

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AN APPRAISAL OF THE PROGRAMS IN RECREATION\*

C. B. Smith  
Assistant Director of Extension Work

A survey of extension work may properly begin with some broad statement of what recreation may be. One of our well-known educators said that "the attempts we may make in leisure hours to elaborate the common life and weave into it meanings and appreciations not derived from external necessity may be considered as contributing to the re-creation of life." In other words, recreation should help to make life more meaningful - richer.

With this thought, we are sure that some recreation for rural people has long been afforded them by means of the activities carried on in the general extension programs. Farm people come to agricultural meetings held by the county agents for more than the subject matter they may gain there. They come to be with their neighbors, to meet together, to visit, to talk over the day's pleasantries, the success and progress each is meeting in their everyday life. And that is recreational. Then too, many of the meetings by stimulating thinking, by yielding new outlooks, insights, opportunities, and inspirations are truly conducive to productive recreation of the highest type. County agents also bring speakers from outside the field of agriculture, and often add an entertainment feature to many of their meetings. The many thousand picnics, tours, excursions conducted by the county agents yield not only new information on better agricultural practices, but are means of real recreation for the participants.

These same things are true also of meetings held by the home demonstration agents and the meetings of 4-H club members. Much of the work in the women's project group meetings, as for example in the field of handicraft, is recreational. The continued attendance of many rural women at these meetings over the years indicates that recreation as well as knowledge is obtained. The luncheons, visits in homes, the free discussions which mark many thousand project groups annually, increase the rural woman's opportunity for recreation. Nor must we overlook the many women's camps conducted each year at which rural women gain rest, recreation, freshening outlooks, and new courage.

The 4-H club programs have been marked by recreational features. Recreation truly is part of the warp and woof of the 4-H club effort in camp and in meetings in schools, fields, and homes. The 4-H club recreational activities are constantly improving and constantly growing in value.

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\*Presented at Regional Extension Conference, Eastern States, Boston, Mass., February 19 to 21, 1936.



Our statistical reports do not offer a full accounting of recreational activities, but the few records which I now will cite do indicate what a large part of the everyday work in extension recreation has become. In handicraft we find according to the 1934 report, that county agents conducted with the help of local leaders a total of 1,030 meetings with an attendance of 16,000 people. 27,040 club projects in handicraft were completed in 1934. 67,878 families are reported as following recommendations regarding handicrafts.

- 1,149 agents reported 13,997 communities at work in developing recreation in 1934 with 74,047 families reported as following recommendations with reference to home recreation.
- 7,343 community or county-wide pageants or plays were reported by 911 agents.
- 1,148 camp club houses, permanent camps, or rest rooms for adults were reported by 350 agents, and 248 such houses or camps were established for juniors.
- 4,776 school or community grounds were improved in 1934 in accordance with the plans furnished by 776 agents.
- 2,954 communities were assisted in providing library facilities as reported by 455 agents.
- 13,597 4-H clubs in 1,101 counties were engaged in community activities as improving the school grounds. All together there were 24,696 communities in 1,285 counties assisted in connection with community or country life work.
- 117,354 families improved the selection of household furnishings.
- 45,244 families increased time for rest and leisure activities as a result of the home-management programs.

The complete story of extension's contribution to improving recreational opportunities for rural people is much greater than the one just presented. With the increase in funds and the growth in numbers of workers, there will be still wider efforts to develop appreciation of recreation and rural life, and to provide ways and means of enjoying leisure time. County club agents, home demonstration agents, are finding new ways and means of providing specific recreation programs in their counties. Specialists in rural recreation and rural sociology are being added to the State extension staffs. These are outlining programs of recreation and give State leadership in this field.

Let us now examine some of the programs and activities. The Massachusetts plan of work in recreation has been commended because of the broad view of the scope of recreation. Plans are followed to encourage local people to study and solve recreational needs in their own communities and cooperation is maintained with all related organizations. The program branches out from the folk-dancing type of recreation to include such activities as playwrighting contests, handicraft exhibits, hobby shows, and dramatic and music festivals.



New Hampshire leads the country with a recreation specialist in every county in the State. The program seems well rounded and is aimed to promote the health of rural people, insure a wiser use of leisure time, and seeks to make opportunities for recreation accessible to all. Recreation councils in local communities are organized. The program too is working away from recreation as such to the more fundamental approaches necessary in an enduring program.

The plans of work for the rural sociologist in Pennsylvania express the belief that the opportunity is now present for the development of an indigenous and high rural culture. Discussion sessions on rural life problems are offered, aids to leadership are given, assistance is offered in making local programs as well as assistance in planning local community buildings and halls for meeting places and recreation. Reading courses are stimulated, well-organized training conferences for rural dramatics are carried forward and the plans include work in pageantry, annual celebrations, rural sports, playgrounds, camps, music, rural art, and home recreation.

In the Middle West we find that the Iowa plans in rural organization list provisions for leadership training to help arrange rural talent demonstrations and make available materials for programs in which people can enjoy "home-made" happiness of an educational type. Too, these activities include community music talent features, 4-H club music programs, music programs for rural churches, community dramas, community games, and hobbies.

The Illinois plan in rural sociology is to help in developing music and drama activities, conducting public discussions, recreation institutes, county choruses, and the organization of discussion groups.

The program in Ohio appeals to many. It stresses the local community approach encouraging discovery and more complete utilization of local resources. Perhaps there is a little too much emphasis on recreational activities as such. Improvement is sought in rural organization meetings and their programs; assistance and training is given in dramatics; rural communities are aided in planning their recreational programs and training local leadership to conduct them and assistance is given in conducting these phases at seven large district camps of various groups in the State. The farmers' institutes and granges are also given help in developing their programs. Rural community theaters are to be planned and assistance given in conducting them, and much assistance given to the 4-H club people in planning their recreational work.

In Wisconsin the plans in rural sociology place major emphasis on three projects; viz., organization and program planning; public discussion; and drama and music, games, and athletics. The program is well organized to reach many parts of the State.

Colorado has plans for cooperating with 30 county farmers' union organizations, 30 county granges, and 5 county farm bureaus interested in developing more interesting and attractive programs for their meetings. One hundred local farm-organization groups are to be provided with suggestions



Memorandum to Mr. Bassett

Kelley

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which was charged to you on April 23, 1941

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overdue

If you need the publication sent you again soon, please initial and return this card

Date MAY 8 1941

Mary F. Carpenter

In charge of Loan Desk

Library, Bureau of Agricultural Economics  
United States Department of Agriculture

for rural recreational material for the future. In addition, the 50 local farm groups

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A study of the nation forth a truly surprising number and variety of recreational activities. For example, a brief prepared in our office on recreation in junior clubs gives accounts from 17 counties and 32 leaders in 15 States. Corn festivals, 4-H theater parties, picnics, dramatic demonstration teams, one-act plays, concerts, human Christmas trees, water sports, baseball leagues, "wiener" roasts, formal dances, patriotic parades, club dances, recreational display booths at county fairs, older young people's clubs, health playlets, indoor and outdoor game contests, and 4-H basketball teams and tournaments are some of the activities recorded in this brief.

How shall we appraise the programs and activities in recreation? Briefly, recreation is finding itself. Rural people are recognizing the need for recreation and are welcoming its further development. The offerings in recreation by extension workers are gradually attaining a higher level. The dissatisfactions and dangers which may come with programs of more entertainment, particularly if such entertainment is brought from the outside, are being recognized. Much emphasis is placed on music, dramatics, and games. May we say that the programs in recreation will receive wider support and earn greater appreciation when, and if in cooperation with schools, churches, and libraries, other features which stimulate self-development are added. The fields and woods of the country and their denizens, the home grounds beautiful, the promotion of neatness and orderliness, beauty in the farm home and on the grounds, the development of opportunities for art work, and the reviving of local handicrafts all need to be stimulated. Any recreational enterprise should be gauged in terms of the opportunities it offers individuals for a wider range in the development of interests and its potentialities for future and varied satisfactions.



These values come more surely when the enjoyment of the activity or feature is dependent upon some educational training and self-development.

Our folk life is said to be barren. This is to be expected in a country still so new and so heterogeneous in the character of its people. Isolation itself still prevails in many rural areas. The struggle to win over nature, the heavy toil on the farms, an inheritance from Puritan forefathers of the belief that life was earnest, that pleasures were vain, the belief that the farmer must toil unremittingly even when he could find leisure time - all these have retarded the development of opportunities to enrich life through recreation.

We have great opportunities in extension work to help rural people rediscover their homes and communities and living. We can contribute much in stimulating higher appreciation of the things which truly enrich life in the country and help the rural people lay the foundations of a better folk life. Because of these things, it gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to find in appraising our recreational work that the leaders here and there see these needs and are planning their programs so that there will be left behind in the hearts and minds of an ever widening circle, greater and greater appreciations of the things that will help individuals grow from within, enrich their lives, raise their sights, widen their horizons, and make life the more worth living.

In bringing this paper to a close, I would leave in your minds these thoughts:

For the purpose of extension work, we may define recreation as any form of human activity not concerned primarily with making a living or doing our duty. It's the thing we do for the sheer joy of it.

The commonest kind of recreation in youth is play: running, romping, wrestling, swimming, jumping, etc. -- something active. Singing grows in significance as we reach maturity, and continues on into old age. It is probably the most liked and most universal of all recreational activities. It may well form a part of every group meeting and every individual's life. It is something each of us can do while we work.

We don't know what to put next in recreational importance, but probably reading, sociability, conversation, companionship, parties, dancing, plays, pageantry, and the church. Nature hikes, camps, hunting, and fishing fit into the picture here, also. A little later in life come study, politics, debate, writing, music, art, handicraft, travel. Later still come philosophy and meditation and a continuation of politics.

It is the business of extension to find out the likes of every one of its constituents and then to help them find a way to express themselves in each activity in which they find enjoyment.



Recreation, it is seen, is as broad as all human interests. To teach recreation requires as broad and fundamental training as any subject in the whole extension field. Indeed, it is probable that no one person can begin to cover the whole field of recreation. It must have many subdivisions.

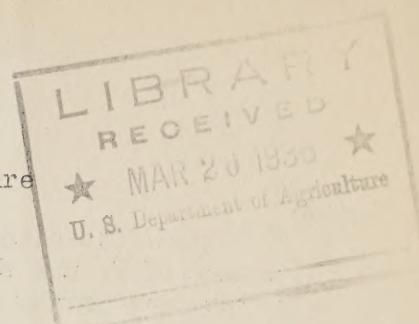
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In the multiplicity of things that may be done in this field, our chief task is to select those we are best prepared to teach and which will be of benefit to the largest number of people. We shall have to leave the decision as to which is of first importance in each State to each State extension staff itself; but, if your speaker ever becomes a recreation extension agent, he is likely to stress singing, games, and nature observation as the things he will push first, and then he will encourage every soul he can get acquainted with to develop the activity native within him and which is clamoring for expression, whether that is music, or craftsmanship, or rhythm, or acting, or writing, or something else, and help such individual attain his or her desired goal.



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Colorado has plans for cooperating with 30 county farmers' union organizations, 30 county granges, and 5 county farm bureaus interested in developing more interesting and attractive programs for their meetings. One hundred local farm-organization groups are to be provided with suggestions



for rural recreation. Fifty local farm groups are to be provided program material for the formation of 25 community choruses, orchestras, or bands. In addition, the advantages of public discussion are to be presented to 50 local farm groups.

The report of the specialist in rural sociology in Virginia for 1934 lists many interesting results of the effort to improve rural recreation. Community singing, home-talent plays, picnics, field days, and holiday programs, community choruses and quartets, grange lecture schools, and rural-minister summer schools give some indication of the range of the work in rural recreation.

The rural sociologists in New York record that nine counties were served with work in rural dramatics, which effort was marked by demonstration and training meetings. The seventh State community dramatics festival was conducted with 10 counties entering. The loan library made 182 loans of book collections of plays and 2,470 loans of single plays. Twenty counties were served with juvenile dramatics and 24 counties listed work in the project called adult recreation. Help was given in organizing and conducting rural music activities and 10 counties were assisted in organizing their 4-H club programs.

A study of the narrative reports of county extension agents brings forth a truly surprising number and variety of recreational activities. For example, a brief prepared in our office on recreation in junior clubs gives accounts from 17 counties and 32 leaders in 15 States. Corn festivals, 4-H theater parties, picnics, dramatic demonstration teams, one-act plays, concerts, human Christmas trees, water sports, baseball leagues, "wiener" roasts, formal dances, patriotic parades, club dances, recreational display booths at county fairs, older young people's clubs, health playlets, indoor and outdoor game contests, and 4-H basketball teams and tournaments are some of the activities recorded in this brief.

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